



Inclusion Through Diversity

Marcia E. Lynch, Public Information Officer
607-274-5555, Office
607-227-2152, Cell
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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **July 16, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Karen W. Baer Appointed Director of Human Rights

The Tompkins County Legislature has confirmed the appointment of Karen W. Baer as Tompkins County Director of Human Rights. County Administrator Joe Mareane's appointment was confirmed by unanimous vote of the Legislature (Legislators Jim Dennis and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne were excused).

Ms. Baer is Executive Director of the Geneva Human Rights Commission, Geneva, NY, a position she has held since 1997. She has also served as the part-time Director of Enforcement for the Fair Housing Council of Central New York. Leading the Geneva Human Rights Commission, Ms. Baer develops, administers, and evaluates effective human rights programs to promote mutual respect and understanding among all community racial, religious, and ethnic groups, and helps enforce state and federal civil rights laws in such areas as employment, housing, and public accommodation. As Fair Housing Council Director of Enforcement, she investigates, evaluates, and resolves housing discrimination complaints based on federal, state, and local protections.

Past honors include the Geneva Chapter NAACP MaryAnn Mallard Community Service Award, the Geneva Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Committee Community Service Award, and the Brown v. Board of Education Award and the NAACP Image Award, both presented by the Geneva Chapter NAACP.

Ms. Baer holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Cornell University and a Juris Doctor degree from Syracuse University College of Law. She is currently enrolled in the Fair Housing Investigation Certificate program at the National Fair Housing Training Academy, U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School, Washington, D.C. (expected completion: Fall 2013).

In announcing the appointment, Administrator Mareane said Ms. Baer comes to the County with a long record of accomplishments, a clear vision, and a true passion for the mission of human rights. "We should all feel very good about a high quality appointment," he said.

"I'm very excited about returning to the Ithaca area and for the opportunity to do my life's work in this uniquely vibrant, engaged, and diverse community," Director Baer states. "I make a pledge to all Tompkins County residents to protect their human rights wherever discrimination exists, while striving to provide high-quality and impactful human rights programs in order to promote inclusion, equal opportunity, and mutual understanding."

Ms. Baer will begin service with Tompkins County September 1.

Contact: County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Marks End of an Era in Courthouse Legislative Chambers

Looking backward and looking ahead, the Tompkins County Legislature took a few minutes to reflect, as it marked the end of 80 years in its home on the second floor of the Tompkins County Courthouse. The Legislature deliberated for the final time in its Courthouse space, which it is leaving to accommodate needs of the New York State Court System. On August 6, it will reconvene in its new legislative chambers on the second floor of the historic Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building—formerly known as the Old Courthouse.

Many legislators reflected on the Chamber's history, and on the long and careful process that brought the County to preserve the historic Old Courthouse for its new Chambers. They thanked the Capital Plan Review Committee, staff, and HOLT Architects for their work in making the necessary Legislature relocation reality. Chair Martha Robertson remarked, "We didn't choose to do it... We didn't take the easy way out... This has been a series of moves, a series of decisions, to do this in the most effective way, with an eye toward the next 80 years."

Attending the nostalgic ceremony were former Chairs Stuart Stein, Barbara Mink, and Mike Koplinka-Loehr, and former Legislators Eric Lerner and Jeff True, who reflected on public service in the Chamber, and how things had both changed and remained the same. Mr. Stein, who served on the board for 20 years and as Chair for three, said that he has fond memories of the place, and credited the Legislature for "moving to a room that is historic and inspiring, and will inspire you to do more of the wonderful things you do here." Mr. Koplinka-Loehr expressed appreciation that the new Chambers will provide much more room for the public.

Legislators took down the County Seal and removed the flags gracing the Chamber. In helping to take down the seal, Legislature Vice Chair Mike Lane, Chair of the Legislature's Capital Plan Review Committee remarked, "It's historic. We are decommissioning it in this room and will re-commission it in the new Chambers."

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; Vice Chair Michael Lane, Chair of the Capital Plan Review Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440.

Legislature Adopts Amendment to Code of Ethics

After many months of discussion, the Legislature adopted a new Local Law, amending the County's Code of Ethics. Tonight's final vote was 13-0, with Legislators Jim Dennis and Pam Mackesey excused. After an earlier public hearing in March, a second one was held this evening, which produced no comment. Review of the Code began after an Ethics Audit by the New York State Comptroller in 2010, with much deliberation following by the County Ethics Advisory Board and the Legislature's Government Operations Committee. Before tonight's adoption, a minor change was made that clarified that standards of conduct prohibiting a County officer or employee from engaging in personal or private activities during times when required to work for the County should not be construed as prohibiting Legislators from engaging in outside employment.

Contact: Patricia Pryor, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 319-0507; Legislator Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Tompkins County Ethics Advisory Board, 257-7453.

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Requested that New York State designate Tompkins County as the designated recipient for the Federal Transit Administration consolidated Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program. Designating the County, rather than New York State, as the recipient, it is noted, will enable the County to continue to locally manage project selection, grant management, schedule, and federal aid reimbursements for the program, and to continue to develop effective and innovation community mobility services with its transportation partners.
- Authorized the release to the State of a just over \$1 million issue in zero-interest Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds, issued as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, in view of procedural delays involving an effort to coordinate joint issue among counties aimed at lowering individual county costs. The County wishes to support energy efficiency improvements to the County Public Safety Building through conventional financing to enable that project to be completed this year.
- Authorized acceptance of a \$27,500 State Homeland Security Law Enforcement Law Enforcement grant to purchase a virtual training system firearms training simulator for the Sheriff's Office. Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera voted no, due to her concerns about the possible link between Homeland Security funding and providing local fingerprint data for immigration enforcement at the federal level.

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